



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR NEWSLETTER *

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Detroit Public Library, Detroit 2, Mich.

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REPORT FROM CHICAGO

The program meeting, "LABOR AND THE AMERICAN HERITAGE" held at the ALA 75th Anniversary Conference on July 10, at 3 P.M., was sponsored jointly by the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, by the Audio-Visual Board and the Adult Education Section of the Public Libraries Division.

As readers of the NEWSLETTER know the main feature of the meeting was the showing of the film "With These Hands" and the discussion following it.

In her introductory remarks Dorothy Bendix, who presided, explained that in planning the program the cooperative groups wanted it to be in keeping with the Conference theme: "The Heritage of the USA in Times of Crisis." They felt that it was particularly appropriate to have a meeting dealing with Labor's part in the American Heritage. The film WITH THESE HANDS seemed to be especially well suited for this purpose. Miss Bendix then introduced Mr. Abraham Plotkin, Midwestern Representative of the ILGWU, who was invited as a resource person, and Miss Ida Goshkin, Director of the Group Services Department of the Akron Public Library, who acted as moderator of the buzz session which followed the film showing.

In introducing the film Miss Goshkin mentioned that WITH THESE HANDS was produced by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, AFL, and that it was the first feature film produced by a labor union and premiered on Broadway. She also announced the two questions which were to be discussed in the buzz session:

- 1) Should the Library put labor films such as WITH THESE HANDS in its film collection?
- 2) How would you use this film in your program?

* The material published in the NEWSLETTER and the opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups.

For those NEWSLETTER readers who have not yet seen WITH THESE HANDS here is a brief summary:

Alexander Brody, a man of 65, is applying for retirement under the Union Pension Fund. To the question, "When did you join the union?" he replies, "1910 ... January, 1910." As he studies his hands, his thoughts are heard. "How many seams can two hands sew in 40 years ..." His thoughts go back those 40 years, and he sees himself as a worker in a 1910 sweatshop...

As he thinks of the dark days of the cloakmaker's strike of 1910, of the tragedy of the Triangle fire, the disastrous strike of 1926, these and other highlights of I.L.G. history are dramatized. The growth of his union, as it seeks increased stability and security for him and for the other members of his union and for workers in other industries, is shown through his own part in the union's history.

As Brody looks at his hands and as he looks around him and sees what the union means, he realizes how effectively the goal has been achieved.

After the showing of the film Miss Goshkin asked the audience to break up into groups of not more than ten, to select a chairman and a reporter, and in reporting to be sure that minority as well as majority opinion was represented and reported.

At the end of the buzz session and after each group had reported, Mrs. Grace Stevenson, Head, Adult Education Department, of the Seattle Public Library summarized the reports as follows:

There was general agreement that all but the smallest libraries should have the film, particularly cities with a strong trade union movement. Some people expressed the opinion that there would probably not be enough understanding in smaller towns although it was also said that the film would be good for interesting various community groups in Labor's problems and achievements.

As for the use of the film in the Library's program, the audience agreed that the film could be used with both union and non-union groups. In the case of union groups it was suggested that the film was useful not only for I.L.G. locals but for any union, particularly for new members.

With non-union groups knowing little about unions the forum type of program was suggested, possibly as part of a series of films on the American Heritage. Young adults, high school and college students were mentioned as suitable audiences. Women's clubs, PTA's, and church groups were also considered possibilities. It was suggested that other materials, such as a book and pamphlet display, booklists, and records should accompany the film.

A large majority of the audience felt that the film was well done and well balanced, although there were a few dissenting voices who felt that it was too long and a little sentimental in spots.

After some further general discussion Mr. Plotkin told the group how and why the film had been produced and how "old-timers" in the union movement felt about it. He also answered questions from the audience.

At the end of the meeting Miss Bendix asked that as many people as possible fill out the post-meeting score sheets which were being distributed. As was promised at the meeting the results were tabulated and can be summarized as follows.

Unfortunately only 39 score sheets were filled out. Of these 8 evaluated the meeting as "swell" (or "excellent"); the remaining 31 marked it "good".

In answer to the second question (What were the main strengths of the meeting?) the replies were as follows:

Film itself, the way it was used in the meeting and the suggestions for its use with groups	16
Presence and presentation of Mr. Plotkin	11
Good audience participation	10
Use of buzz session technique (chance for wide participation)	9
Summary at the end	4
Good planning and organization	4
Group discussions and expression of opinions	4
Interchange of ideas	2
Well moderated	2
Use of traveling loud-speaker	2
Its informality	1
Good pace	1
Genuineness of interest in serving labor groups and in interpreting the labor movement to the general public	1
Learned something about new field	1
Creation of interest by introductory remarks	1
Minority reports were called for and encouraged	1

In answer to the third question (What were its main weaknesses?) the following replies were made:

Lack of controversy	9
"Questions overlapped in content"	
"Questions not controversial enough"	
"Film not controversial enough to lead to divergence of opinion"	
Buzz session	6
"Not enough questions"	
"Range of discussion too narrow"	
"Too short for <u>real</u> discussion"	
"Did not make important contribution"	
"Discussion period too short"	
Physical setup	3
"Terrible room"	
"Acoustics"	
"Film too long"	1
"Mr. Plotkin should have been given more time"	1
"No clear idea of what to expect"	1
"Too long"	1
"Tendency to glowing generalities"	1
"Not enough time"	1
"Too specialized - not all libraries have film collections"	1

In answer to the fourth question for Suggestions and Comments here are some of the replies which seem of most general interest:

- "Why not try a session using role playing"
- "Some continuing contact would be good. Could the NEWSLETTER expand to include a 'workshop by mail'.
- "Union leaders on program telling what they want from library as at Cleveland ALA meeting"
- "Could we have a list of films in a series of which this one would be a part, building up interest in and knowledge of the whole labor problem, both sides"
- "Of necessity the film had to show only the side of one union. It would be well if a composite of all unions and their problems could be produced"
- "Some discussion of ways labor groups have been interested and served in various libraries would be desirable in future meetings"
- "Bringing in books and related materials would be desirable. Certainly this is an excellent way of getting down to earth about controversial problems in our society"
- "Perhaps a film giving some of the abuses within labor itself - an answer to criticism of labor"
- "More like it"

It may also be of interest to note the following breakdown by type of library and size of community for the 28 participants who listed the name of their library on the score sheet:

Public Library

Population

Over 1 million (8 from Chicago)	10	
500,000 - 1,000,000	4	
100,000 - 500,000	5	
50,000 - 100,000	2	
10,000 - 50,000	1	
Under 10,000	<u>1</u>	23

State Library

1

County Library

4

28

The Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups is very glad to have these comments - both positive and negative - and will take them under careful consideration in planning future programs. While some of the criticism is well taken

other comments illustrate the difficulty of arranging programs which will be of interest both to "old-timers" and those new in the field. Except for repeating similar introductory programs at certain intervals the Committee sees no ready solution to this problem.

All NEWSLETTER readers are urged to send in their suggestions for future meetings of the Joint Committee. They will be carefully considered.

As was mentioned at the meeting this issue of the NEWSLETTER will be sent to all participants who gave their name and address and who are not now on the mailing list. Requests for having one's name added to the mailing list should be sent to the Editor.

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NEWS OF GENERAL INTEREST

From Boston, Mass.

In observance of Labor Day, an exhibit on Labor's Role in the Community, with posters, pamphlets, and photographs supplied by local AFL and CIO unions or chosen from the Library's special collection of books on trade unions, was presented in the Main Lobby of the Central Library from August 31 through September 30. The resulting publicity (including several full-page newspaper write-ups) was so remarkable that a more detailed account will appear in the next issue of the NEWSLETTER.

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From Chicago, Illinois

When the Chicago Industrial Union Council, CIO, held its 6th annual conference at the Congress Hotel in the spring of 1951, the Chicago Public Library was invited to participate by sending a display.

The Council had chosen for its workshop discussions the problems of the citizen in today's world of conflict and confusion and had planned its program to help unions and their individual members to function more effectively. Such topics as Housing, Health, Civil Defense, Civil Liberties, etc. were to be discussed at group meetings following the general meeting of all delegates.

The Business and Civics Department which serves labor, prepared an exhibit of books, pamphlets and magazines which, together with appropriate lists, were attractively set up in the hotel corridor outside the meeting rooms. Every delegate, in the course of the day, had to pass our exhibit and a high percentage of those who attended the meetings stopped to talk to the librarian on duty or to browse. A number of animated impromptu discussions of some of the titles displayed occurred with the volume being passed around among the participants. "When Forman and Steward Bargain" was one of the books which most often roused this interest. Of the reading lists distributed, the most popular was "Civilian Defense Against the A-Bomb".

The high concentration of purposeful conference attendants minus any outside distractions to divert their attention, made it possible to tell the Library's story effectively and individually; to explain its services and to answer questions.

Although the meeting lasted only one day, at its end, a goodly number of people knew the location of the Chicago Public Library and what they could expect to find there.

Irene H. Peterson, Chief
Business and Civics Department

From Milwaukee, Wisconsin

You might be interested in how I am using YOU AND UNIONS by Dale Yoder, published by Science Research Associates.

The publishers sent us twenty copies for free distribution to labor leaders, particularly those interested in workers' education. I read the book (or rather, pamphlet) very carefully and although it was certainly not pro-labor, it was equally not pro-management and, I felt, gave a good, objective and easily read introduction to the labor movement. I also had some labor educators read it and they had the same reaction.

With the pamphlet, I sent a letter, explaining the fact that, although the pamphlet was written particularly for high school students, it had real merit as an introduction to young people in the labor movement and even to those who had been in for a long time but had never been sufficiently interested to read more serious literature.

In the same letter, I told them about other services available to them from the library. I sent this to a representative group of AFL, CIO and independent labor leaders.

The response has been - and is continuing to be - very good. Up to date, I have sold (our library does sell pamphlets) nearly 400 copies. Regardless of the number that anyone buys, we sell it at the quantity rate of 25¢ a copy. Several unions are sending them to other locals or individuals within the union.

Ruth Shapiro, Chief
Department of Group Services

From Salina, Kansas

The Salina Library recently put out a flier "The Worker" featuring three books on labor. We have an ingenious arrangement, specially recommended for libraries with no printing budget. We place the three books in the weekly newspaper as our regular list. Then the paper kindly loans us the type - and we print it on our 40 year old Pearl Press. Our custodian has learned how to print in the last year. Distribution is via our main circulation desk plus copies sent to the local labor council.

Jerome Cushman, Librarian